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28 January 1963

MEMORANDUM

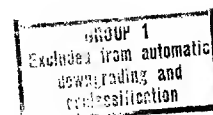
SUBJECT: Soviet Civil Air Route to Cuba

1. The Soviet civil airline, Aeroflot, inaugurated its first regularly scheduled flight from Moscow to Havana via Murmansk on 7 January 1963. The flight by a Soviet TU-114 four-engine turboprop transport opened the first Soviet air route into the Western hemisphere and is billed by Moscow as the "world's longest regular nonstop air service." A roundtrip flight is now scheduled to be flown once a week rather than twice as announced initially by the USSR.

2. The new route goes north from Moscow to Murmansk and from there, after a stop for refueling, direct to Havana over neutral waters of the Norwegian and Greenland Seas, the Danish Straits, the Atlantic Ocean and the Straits of Florida--a total distance of more than 8,600 miles. The route does not pass through the airspace of Western countries, but the Soviets have requested the use of navigational and weather aids from Norway, Iceland, Canada, the UK and the US. The flight from Moscow to Havana is covered in about 16 hours flying time; the return trip from Havana to Moscow is shortened to about 14 hours because of favorable winds. By flying nonstop from Murmansk the USSR avoids the problem of obtaining overflight and landing rights from Western countries. These rights became increasingly difficult for the Soviets to obtain after the Cuban crisis erupted last October.

3. Although frequently alleged to be an undependable aircraft, the TU-114 probably is fully capable of servicing the Moscow-Havana route. Maintenance difficulties, which are common to this

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transport--the largest commercial aircraft in use, may present some problems, however, and Moscow has announced they are assigning five aircraft to the Cuban route, possibly in anticipation of such difficulties. For the flight to Cuba the passenger load has been reduced to 60 from the normal 170 in order to carry more fuel. In addition, up to 17,000 pounds of freight could be carried depending on the fuel load. Previously the only regularly scheduled TU-114 service was on a route connecting Moscow and Khabarovsk in the Soviet Far East.

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Remarks: Attached is a memorandum describing the non-stop Soviet civil air route to Cuba. It is forwarded in response to your request, via ODDI and AD/CI, of 25 January for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.			
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